

## Jaded Hearts

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Summary: The true story of Mara Jade's childhood and eventual abduction . . .

## Jaded Hearts

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Disclaimer: Everything associated to Star Wars belongs to George Lucas, Lucasfilm Ltd., Bantam Books, Del Rey, et cetera, et cetera . . . you get the idea--they're not mine. I'm making absolutely zero monies.

Author's note: Well, I know that there are probably many young Mara Jade stories out there, but as a writer, an avid SW fan, and a Mara Jade fan, I was inspired to write my own version. One other thing--please excuse the timeline if it isn't exactly accurate. I tried figuring it in my head (scary thought). Mara, from what I understand, is only a few years younger than Luke. And since this story takes place when she is more or less five years old, I think it's safe to assume that the Clone Wars are over and that Vader and Palpatine are hunting down the Jedi. If I'm wrong, shoot me. This is my vision.

Dedications: This is for my boyfriend's cats. I love you, Chaos, Jigsaw, Curious, & Dragon! \*hugs & kisses\*

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The soft pink clouds rolled gently over the horizon, momentarily masking the sunlight as it filtered down on the green planet below. It was springtime on the northern hemisphere of the small but luscious planet. The planet, known simply as Jayla by the natives, was almost always warm--the perfect climate. And luckily, this small haven was conveniently out of the way of the budding Empire.

Jayla, which meant 'paradise' in the Ancient Language, had escaped any battle damage during the height of the Clone Wars.

It remained the perfect paradise for the people who did not wish to be found, sitting nonchalantly on the edge of the galaxy. Particularly, Jedi who were forced into hiding by the new 'Emperor' Palpatine and his new apprentice, Vader. Even as far out as Jayla, the rumors had not escaped their attention. There were stories of Palpatine and Vader hunting down Jedi and slaughtering them. Many people did not want to believe the rumors. Many people ignored them.

Such as the farmers of Jayla. Jayla had always been a quiet but friendly culture. Industrialization never settled itself in the rich lands, though most households had modern conveniences. They traded their rich silks and delicious fruits, nectars, and vegetables for most technology they possessed.

But the most notable thing about the planet was the untainted, untouched natural beauty. Such as how now, the way the winds rolled through the blossoming fields, caressing the buds with its soothing touch. And the way large families of farmers and traders swam in the late afternoon, cooling themselves in the crystal-clear lakes and rivers after a hard days' work, and celebrating with wine and fruits the abundance of the crops this season. There was only this small paradise in the midst of the chaotic galaxy, and only happiness and fulfillment mattered.

But to some, the pain was not forgotten. Only repressed. There were a few who had fought in the Wars--the few that had survived. Tristan Jade could not forget the day he saw his brother slain, or the thousands of millions of others slaughtered by the cold hands of blank-faced drones, controlled by Palpatine.

Tristan forced the thought out of his mind as he glanced at his wife, Audrey, who had fought beside him in the war. They both had been Jedi Knights, serving under General Kenobi. After the war, they had fled to this planet--Audrey's home world--after the rumors of massacres began.

Audrey had been pregnant with their young daughter, Mara, at the time. A month before Mara's birth, Audrey awoke from a horrible nightmare--which they later decided was a Jedi vision. To be safe, they renounced their Knighthood, and Tristan brought them to Jayla.

As he looked at his wife--at her gorgeous red hair that scattered in the gentle afternoon breeze, and her soft but hardened features, he knew they had done the right thing. Almost five years had passed, and they had experienced nothing but happiness. Tristan met her green eyes as he reached over to squeeze her hand firmly. They had been out by the lake since early afternoon, and the sky was beginning to turn into all shades of purple and pink and orange. It was Audrey's favorite time of the day, and they watched the sun set almost every evening.

A few feet away, Mara lay in the grass quietly, her red hair--so much like her mother's--billowed around her head in the soft grass. The child had been uncharacteristically silent for the last thirty minutes, but Tristan knew she was exhausted from swimming and

wrestling with her big brother Kyle. Kyle, who was four years older than his sister, was still hard at work seeing what he could find on the bottom of the lake.

After twilight faded into the jewel-studded velvet of the nighttime sky, Mara and Kyle were called away by their parents. It was the seventh night--the night the people of the small village of Terra met around a bonfire to exchange stories and tales. It was a tradition that's origins nobody knew, but everyone followed nevertheless. Each family would bring a prize crop and something to drink and the people would feast. Even in Terra, everyone loved an excuse for a party.

Mara, in particular, loved to sit on hay and listen to the tales of times long gone--times that existed only in the memories of the elders. Or the young adventurer who had journeyed away from the planet and returned home with a story to tell. These stories had always fascinated Mara.

On this particular night, she sat with her best friend Lynzi, on the hay. Lynzi's parents owned a farm next to the Jade's, and the two girls were always delighted at the occasion to play together. Mara got sick of only having her brother around. He didn't even like the stories. He said they were 'dull.' He said they were for old people. At least Lynzi liked to listen, too.

Mara sat, enthralled, when her father was asked to speak. She took a sip of her teroch juice as her father found the center of the circle. Lynzi suddenly poked Mara in the side. "Mara, look--your Papa's gonna speak!"

Mara lied down on the hay next to the girl, cupping her chin in her hands, and Tristan Jade began. He spoke of the Wars, and of the heroic Jedi, and of the Empire, and it's new leaders--the evil Palpatine and the dreaded Vader. Mara was enthralled by her father's words. She'd heard him speak of these things before, but never in such detail and with such emotion. Mara found herself disliking this Empire. It seemed so sad to her; so unspeakably sad. Why would anyone want to do such horrible things to other people? The child made a mental note to ask her father later.

When her father was done, everyone sat in awed silence--before erupting into a thundercloud of applause. Tristan Jade was really an excellent storyteller.

Next, townsman Onri Sherlton stood to speak for the group, but Mara was finding it difficult to concentrate. She'd had a busy day helping her parents with the crops and swimming all evening . . . she felt her heavy eyes drifting closed as she curled up next to Lynzi on the hay. The voice of Townsman Sherlton became monotonous--almost soothing as Mara's tired mind drifted away from the last thread of consciousness.

The next thing Mara was aware of was the feeling of strong arms; protective arms--the arms of her father. On a certain level, she knew she was being carried home, but she was unable to register anything in the sleep-induced haze that clouded her mind. Finally, her eyes drifted open, and she knew she was in her own bedroom. It was late, and the starlight filtered in through her bay window, silhouetting her mother in its brilliance. Audrey's red hair sparkled around her

in the moonlight, and for a moment, Mara thought she was her guardian angel. "Mama," she whispered, reaching up for her mother.

Audrey's arms were around her daughter in an instance, wrapping her in her warmth. She kissed her daughter's small forehead lightly. "Goodnight, baby," Audrey said, and only then did Mara look down to notice that someone had changed her into her favorite white lace nightgown--the one Grandma made for her. "Goodnight, Mama."

Next, her father entered the room. He knelt down next to his daughter's tiny bed, placing a strong hand on her face. "Hi there," he said softly, noticing for the millionth time how much she looked like her mother--especially the way her green eyes caught beautifully in the light.

"Hi, Papa," she whispered as she felt her eyes closing once again against her will. But she suddenly forced them open with all the strength she could muster. "Papa?" she asked. "Why do bad people like Palpatine do bad things to other people?"

Tristan gazed thoughtfully at his little girl. "Honey, I really don't know. I guess some people like to have power, even at the expense of others."

Mara frowned uncertainly. She surely didn't understand, but maybe one day she would.

"You know," her father said suddenly, "a long time ago people of this planet believed that women born with red hair and green eyes were considered gifts from the gods, and they would cherish these women and treat them like royalty."

She giggled at Tristan's words. "For real, Papa?"

He tousled her hair softly. "For real, Mara. But as far as I'm concerned, you and your mother are royalty."

Mara smiled contentedly as her eyes closed once again, but this time she didn't fight it. As her sleepy mind once again began to drift off, the last things she felt were her father's goodnight kiss, and his warm, soothing presence.

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Mara awoke to the feeling of a gentle warmth on her eyelids. Mara sighed as her eyes fluttered open. Her covers, now uncomfortably warm, lay tangled around her small body. The sunlight now drifted through the large windows, casting its rays beautifully about the room. Mara kicked off the covers as she hopped out of bed and moved toward the window.

It was just as lovely a day as ever. The sky was blue--not a hint of a cloud in the sky. Below, Mara could see Trent, one of the hired hands, working in the garden with Kyle. Mara frowned, wondering what time it was. Mama and Papa must've let her sleep in.

Mara sighed as she pulled on her housecoat. She wished that she didn't have to do her chores. She wanted so to run to the spring--the place where it widened and formed a small pond. She and Kyle and Lynzi went there sometimes. It was just deep enough to swim in,

especially after a good rain. It would overflow, widening it just enough.

She trudged down the stairs, small feet thumping loudly as she found her way to the kitchen. Her mother was waiting there, and as Mara walked in, Audrey smiled at her daughter as she sat a bowl down in Mara's spot at the table. "There you are, sleepy-head. We thought you would sleep all day."

Mara sat down to eat her oatmeal hungrily. Normally she snubbed the stuff, but it tasted nice today. "Mama, can Kyle and I go to the spring after our chores are done?"

"Sure, but be careful," her mother warned.

"We will."

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Midday. The sun still shone brightly overhead. Like the day before, there was a gentle breeze on the land, cooling and refreshing skin. Mara laughed loudly as her brother splashed her with the cool water.

"I'll get you for that one!" she called, leaning over the edge of the small pool of water as Kyle disappeared beneath the surface. She dived in after him, loving the feel of the silky cool water sliding over her skin. She was quite a strong swimmer for one so young. Most people were on this planet. It was warm most the time, and swimming was one of the most popular things to do on a beautiful day. And her papa used to take her out here every day, until the time came where she learned how to do it on her own. Now Kyle kept an eye on her.

As Mara glided through the water she closed her eyes, feeling for her brother's sense. Finally her hand closed around his ankle, and she felt him jolt in surprise. They both emerged from the water giggling hysterically.

But they both stopped as they noticed the change in the sky--in the air around them. It had grown darker, clouds having emerged from seemingly nowhere. The air seemed to sizzle with energy. Overhead, strange lights could be glimpsed through the clouds. Lights from ships, maybe? But there seemed to be many of them.

"Kyle?" Mara asked as a strange feeling began to form in the back of her mind. She suddenly felt uneasy, and even scared.

"I don't know," he responded uncertainly.

Suddenly, Papa appeared, shouting at them to come home immediately. Mara froze, unable to comprehend what was happening around her. She couldn't run, so she was scooped up by her father, and he carried her home, running all the way.

By the time they reached the house, it was almost pitch black, like nighttime. The stars were bright yellow lights of menacing ships. And out of nowhere, Mara felt the first raindrops on her hair and her skin.

And the sun was no longer there to warm her body, so she began to shiver with cold and rain. Mara could see Mama standing on the front porch, long hair scattering in the wind--for that's what it was now--an outright wind.

Mara could see that Mama was scared, and she began to cry as she was scooped out of her father's arms. The four of them disappeared into the house. "We have to get out of here," Tristan said with a forced calm. But even Mara could see the fear in her father's eyes.

Tristan met Audrey's eyes, and an unspoken agreement was reached in that silent moment. Outside, sounds were reaching the house--the sound of a thousand mechanical things; bad things.

And it was getting louder.

Tristan wasted no more time. "Mara, remember the bad people I told you about? They're here, so you and Kyle have to go. Kyle, take your sister and run into the woods. Understand?"

The boy nodded hesitantly. But there was no time even to say goodbye. The sounds were right above the house now.

Before Mara knew what was happening, she and Kyle were out the back door, running. But Mara's curiosity overcame her fear. She resisted the tug of her brother's hand. She had to see.

She knelt behind a tree, her brother begging for her to come with him. But she ignored him as she watched some kind of space shuttle settle down in the front yard of their home. A long line of white-armored men emerged, followed closely by a towering figure dressed in black, with a black helmet. And in his hand he carried an ignited lightsaber. Mara knew what those are because both Mama and Papa both had one. They were the weapons of the Jedi. But Jedi were good--this man in black was bad.

Mara noticed the way his lightsaber burned crimson, casting a ruby shade on everything within a few feet. Finally, the last occupant emerged from the ship. This was a man covered completely by a dark hood, which shadowed his face. But he was infinitely more evil. Mara could feel it.

And then, this one turned his head in the direction of Mara. She gasped, ducking lower. But she could feel his yellow eyes glaring beneath his dark hood. And then, it was over. The hooded one turned his attention back toward the house, where some of the men in white armor had already entered.

Mara waited for what would happen. She hoped Mama and Papa had found a place to hide . . . but then they were dragged forcefully out by the men in white armor. They were brought to face the man in the hood. Words were exchanged, but Mara could not hear.

Before she knew what was happening, the dark one in the helmet stepped forward, lightsaber held threateningly. And just like that--without any fanfare or warning--he sliced his blade neatly through Tristan's stomach. Before Audrey had time to react, the same fate was bestowed upon her.

Mara and Kyle watched on in horror as their parents were slaughtered before their eyes. Kyle was crying loudly, yanking on Mara's arms. He was saying something about getting out of there.

But Mara barely heard him. She could not move; could not think. She could only stare at the bloody remains of their parents. Suddenly the rain started again, and Mara began to scream.

She screamed and screamed and did not stop screaming until she regained enough of her senses to realize that the bad people had seen her, and were walking over to them. Kyle was frantic now. He practically started dragging his shocked sister through the mud, oblivious to the downpour.

But then, Mara was on her own two feet, and she ran with him. They ran and ran and ran through the woods, the men in white armor right on their tails. When Kyle unexpectedly tripped, he yelled at her not to stop--and she didn't. She did not want to witness her brother's murder.

Mara ducked under some briar, her clothes and hair snagging in the jagged thorns. But she didn't notice. Her flesh and hair was torn, but she continued to run, sobbing and frantic, her tears mixing in the rain. Her limbs were becoming numb with the cold, and she shivered uncontrollably--though from fear or cold, she wasn't sure. But she kept going.

Then suddenly the noises ceased. When she thought the men had stopped chasing her, she flopped down into the mud, back against a tree. She sobbed into her knees then, unsure of what she would do now. "If those people don't kill me, I'll probably die in the woods," she thought bitterly.

"I can assure you, my dear, that will not happen."

Mara's head snapped up. It was pitch-black, but Mara could just make out the silhouette of a hooded figure. She could even see his yellowed eyes. Mara gasped, backing into the trees.

"No need to be upset, little one. No harm will come to you."

Mara glared at him unbelieving. But even so, her tears had dried. "But my mama . . . and Papa . . ." She choked on the words as they came out in a sob.

"Had to die, Mara Jade. They were Jedi. Jedi are a disease to the galaxy."

Mara shook her head rigorously. No. It wasn't true. Mama and Papa were good people. They would never lie.

"Are you certain?" the man asked.

Mara's young face glared at him.

He smiled then, but it wasn't a pleasant smile. "Come with me, Mara Jade. I will show you the true way of the Force. Or you could stay here and die in these woods."

Mara looked at him uncertainly. He had said that he wouldn't hurt

her. And Mara was pretty sure he meant it, because she sensed no betrayal in his voice. And she certainly couldn't stay in these woods. Looking around, Mara realized she had no idea where she was. She had heard horrible stories about people going into the woods and never coming out.

Palpatine stepped closer to the helpless, pathetic child. He reached a hand to her, and as she hesitantly took it, he could feel her power through the Force. Yes, she would be a great asset to the Empire. He wouldn't train her as a Sith, even though she would be shown the ways of the Force. She would use her abilities as his personal assassin, and so much more. It was her destiny.

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For many months, Mara remained secluded, reliving the murder of her parents in her head. She hated Vader, but she could not bring herself to hate Palpatine, even though she knew it was all his doing. Sometimes, she considered asking about her brother. Maybe he had been saved too.

But Mara knew the truth. Her family was dead. When she was sad, she brought herself back to Jayla, recalling everything in sweet detail. How her parents would laugh at her jokes, or her brother would tease her good-naturedly.

But it made everything worse. She began to drift inside herself, and finally Palpatine taught her to repress the memories of her life on Jayla. He said it was for the best.

And eventually, Mara forgot about her beautiful home and Mama and Papa and Kyle and Lynzi. But sometimes, she would wake up in the middle of the night, and realize she had been dreaming of a happy time--a time with a family and friends.

But when she told Palpatine, he scolded her. He told her such things were ridiculous. He was her only family. So it didn't take long for her dreams to vanish into oblivion.

Eventually, Mara Jade became the Emperor's Hand.

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Other Mara Jade stories written by me: "Confessions of the Emperor's Hand," "The Straight Way Lost"

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Thanks for reading! PLEASE review!! I crave feedback like the sweetest chocolate . . .

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file.